



Herald photo/Sonni Schwinn

Guardsmen launch bays into Deer Creek Reservoir during an exercise there.

Utah Guard tries the water at Deer Creek Reservoir

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By SONNI SCHWINN

Heber City Correspondent

HEBER CITY — Members of the Utah National Guard 117th Corps of Engineers (AFBR-Assault Float Bridge Ribbon) tried the waters of Deer Creek Reservoir recently during an exercise in constructing an assault float bridge.

They plan to return Aug. 1 to participate in Heber City's Centennial Boat Parade at Deer Creek. Sgt. Chuck Rackham, recruiter for the 117th, said they will demonstrate their capabilities and provide rides for civilians after the parade.

Troops and equipment often need to cross deep rivers or lakes and need bridges. That's when they call for the engineers.

The 117th arrived at Deer Creek pulling three boats, and three hollow bays that they could turn into a bridge in record time. In fact, during competition with a regular army team in Germany, Utah's 117th set up a bridge in 15 minutes, two minutes quicker than their competitors, using army equipment rather than their own.

Sgt. Rackham described the bays as buoyant "butterflies." The sides are folded across the

center so they can be transported by five-ton trucks. The trucks unload them into the water and the sides open within one and one half seconds of hitting the water. Each opened bay is 19 feet wide and can hold 60 tons. Center bays are 23 feet long and end bays are 19 feet long.

The bays are pushed, not towed, and maneuvered into place by boats that cost \$154,000 each, powered by two 212 horse power diesel engines. Rackham said the boats only average 25 to 30 mph but can pull just about anything. They are also capable of stopping and turning on the spot and only require 22 inches of clearance to float.

The connections that hold the bays together are like hinges, to allow "give" as they float on moving water, explained Sgt. Courtney Fairbourne, who directed the construction Saturday. A ramp at each end of the bridge provides a dry approach for whatever needs to cross, from foot soldiers to tanks.

When the job is done, the engineers quickly disconnect the bridge, load the equipment back on trucks, and move on to wherever they're needed next.

While the men efficiently focused on the project at hand,

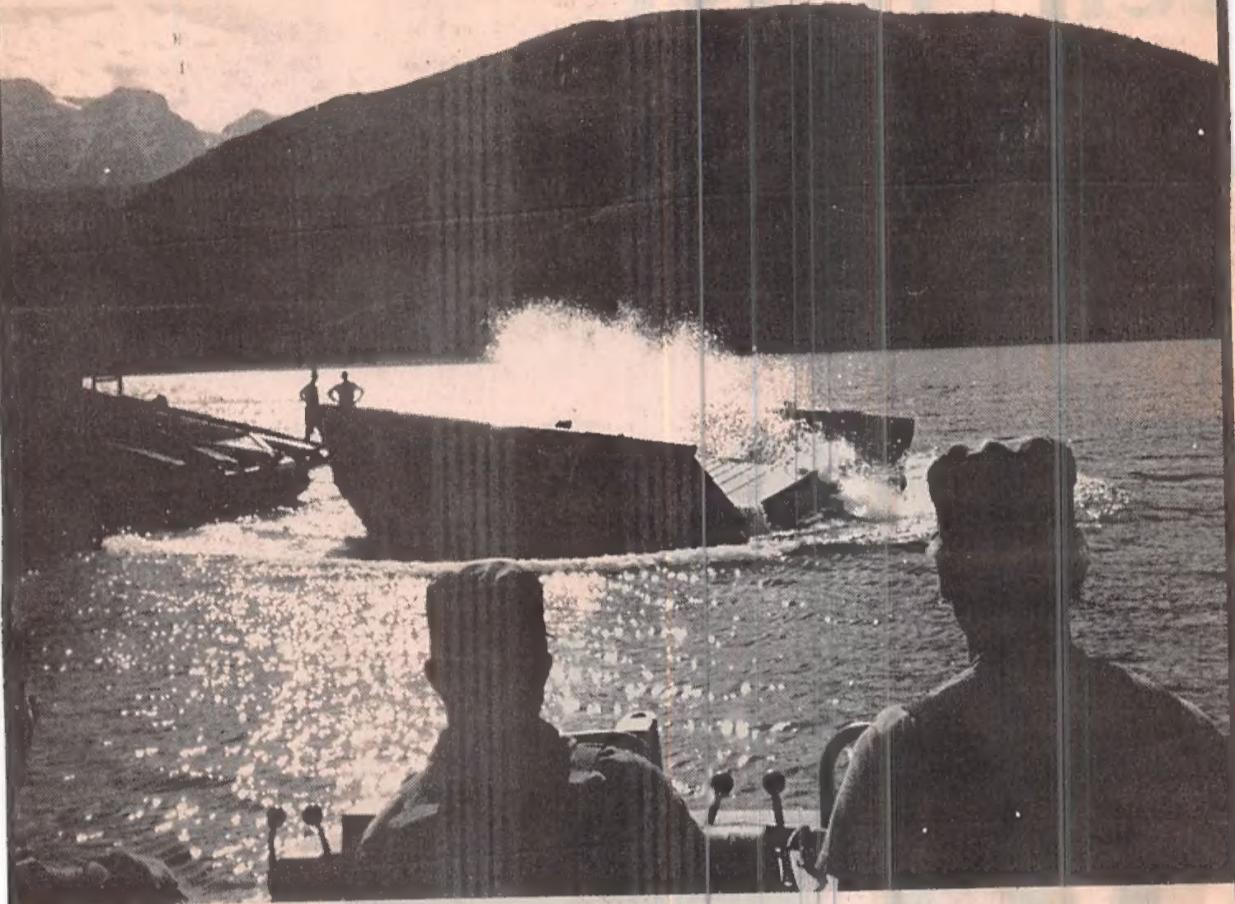
expertly coordinated by Sgt. Fairbourne, and nobody fooled around, they obviously enjoyed their work.

When the exercise was over, an enthusiastic boat pilot explained that he always has fun maneuvering the boats, and that he enjoys working with the other men in the 117th. He said the men he was working with that day were not his regular crew, but they all work together in the same way. As a result, they are well coordinated, which is how he explained their victory in the competition in Germany, which he participated in.

He said if he is ever called into active service, he will have the advantage of being with his own local Guard unit, with friends who care about him, rather than just being stuck in the middle of strangers. Although building a floating bridge under fire would not be fun, the teamwork developed as the same men train together in the Guard could be also lifesaving, he said.

Sgt. Rackham is beginning this week to sign up the first recruits for the detachment of the 117th which is being organized in Wasatch County.

The Utah National Guard Comes To Wasatch County



The Utah National Guard 117th Corps of Engineers (AFBR) can unload boats and bays (floating bridge sections), and construct an assault float bridge ribbon in 15-minutes.



Members of the Utah National Guard 117th Corps of Engineers (AFBR — Assault Float Bridge Ribbon) tried the waters of Deer Creek Reservoir last Saturday during an exercise in constructing an assault float bridge. Some will return this Friday to demonstrate their equipment and talk to high school students about what the Guard offers them.

They plan to return again Aug. 1 to participate in Heber City's Centennial Boat Parade at Deer Creek. Sgt. Chuck Rackham, recruiter for the 117th, said they will also demonstrate their capabilities and provide rides for civilians.

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The connections that hold the bays together are like hinges, to allow "give" as they float on moving water, explained Sgt. Courtney Fairbourne, who directed the construction Saturday. A ramp at each end of the bridge provides a dry approach for whatever needs to cross, from foot soldiers to tanks.

When the job is done, the engineers quickly disconnect the bridge, load the equipment back on trucks, and move onto wherever they're needed next.

What was even more impressive than constructing a bridge in minutes was the fun the men apparently had while they were doing it. They efficiently focused on the project at hand, expertly coordinated by Sgt. Fairbourne, and nobody fooled around, but their grins divulged the fun they were having at their jobs.

When the exercise was over, an enthusiastic boat pilot explained

that he always has fun maneuvering the boats, and that he enjoys working with the other men in the 117th. He said he was working with different men that day than he usually works with, but they all work together in the same way. As a result, they are well coordinated, which is how he explained their victory in the competition in Germany, which he participated in.

He said if he is ever called into active service, he will have the advantage of being with his own local Guard unit, with friends who care about him, rather than just being stuck in the middle of strangers. Although building a floating bridge under fire would not be fun, the teamwork developed as the same men train together in the Guard could be also lifesaving, he said.

The Guard unit being organized in Wasatch County will be a detachment of the 117th and will participate in exercises like the one on Deer Creek last Saturday. Sgt. Rackham will be at Wasatch High School Friday to tell students what the Guard offers and answer questions, as well as demonstrate equipment. He said he hopes to be able to sign up the first recruits for the local detachment before June. He explained that since the 117th is a combat unit, and women aren't allowed in combat, he will only be recruiting junior and senior boys.

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